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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED
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SUBJECT: ANC LAUNCHES VETERAN'S LEAGUE

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The African National Congress (ANC) announced on December 3 that it would create a party branch for veterans of the movement. The formation of the league -- known as the ANC Veteran's League (ANCVL) -- comes after the party resolved in 2007 to form a branch for veterans. The ANCVL will have voting rights within the party in line with what the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) have. The new league says its focus will be on veterans' issues, eradication of poverty, and outreach to other "progressive movements." How much influence the ANCVL will have relative to other voices within the party remains unclear. Some argue that it will have difficulty getting its views heard in the face of the more vociferous like the ANCVL, but others argue that the tradition of respect for elders may elevate the Veterans' League, particularly in the area of brokering consensus. End Summary.

ANC Forms New League

¶2. (SBU) The ANC announced on December 3 that it would create a party branch for veterans of the movement. ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe told reporters the ANCVL would be "a source of wisdom to the mother body in times of trouble." He added, "We want the veterans to play their rightful role. They have the knowledge, they have the experience and they have a track record we can tap into in a structural way. Their experience won't be for the league only, but for the whole movement." The ANCVL is set to join the youth league and the women's league with voting delegates. The inaugural ANCVL conference held on December 6 had 400 voting delegates. One hundred and twenty-eight non-voting delegates from the ANCVL and ANCWL attended and helped draft the new league's constitution and program of action.

¶3. (SBU) The new league was first conceived at the ANC's party congress at Polokwane in 2007. According to a statement issued by the ANCVL, the resolution passed at the 2007 congress was "premised on the knowledge that many veterans have served the ANC and the struggle of our people's movement in different capacities over various epochs." The ANCVL said, "Veterans have an important contribution they can

make with regards to the institutional memory of our organization, vis-a-vis its past decisions, culture, tradition, and purposes of the organization in successive epochs that constitute the golden thread of our organization." (Note: The ANCVL was conceived at the congress in part because of lobbying by many veterans who felt they were ignored or mistreated under the Thabo Mbeki presidency. End Note.) Membership of the league will be confined to those older than 60 with 40 years of unbroken service to the party.

14. (SBU) The league laid out three priorities. First, it said it would urgently look into the welfare of all ANC veterans through "systematic institutional mechanisms." Second, the ANCVL said it would prioritize the eradication of poverty. Third, the league noted that it would seek an international role. The ANCVL said, "Having noted that the international community played a very important role in our struggle for a free and democratic society, we further affirmed our role towards reviving bilateral and multilateral relations with progressive organizations throughout the world in general, and in Africa in particular, with a view of furthering the aims and objectives of a progressive agenda through continued solidarity." (Note: The league's statements on its international role track with reports that President Jacob Zuma wants to bolster relationships with former liberation movements such as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique. End Note.)

15. (SBU) Sandi Sijake will lead the new branch. Sijake joined the ANC in 1959 and later trained in the armed wing of the movement known as Umkhonto we Sizwe ("MK") in Egypt and the Soviet Union. After the end of apartheid, he joined the

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South African National Defense Force in 1994 and retired as Major General in Defense Intelligence in 2005. Thandi Cecilia Memela will serve as Deputy President, Natso Khumalo will serve as Secretary General, and Fanele Mbali Herbert will serve as Treasurer. Nelson Mandela will serve as Honorary Life President of the ANCVL.

Questions Over Whether it Can Off-Set Vocal Youth League

16. (SBU) Commentators such as Center for Politics and Research Executive Director Prince Mashele believe the new league will mirror the ANCVL more than the ANCYL. In other words, he assesses the Veteran's League will have limited influence over party matters. Mashele argues that the Youth League's "culture of disrespecting the elders" would limit space for the veterans to exert their influence. He judges, "It is not the style of the elders to publicly talk about matters that affect the ANC." Others argue that many veterans also motivated by self-interests and are less interested in remaining politically active into retirement. Sijake himself noted that members "were not likely to seek political office through party structures."

Comment

17. (C) The creation of a veteran's league is an historic decision for the ANC. The party's poor handling of veterans' issues over the years has been well-documented. Any political body that can at least draw attention to the concerns of former freedom fighters should be welcomed within the movement. Mashele's comments about the ANCVL having limited influence notwithstanding, we would argue that the jury is out on how much of a role the new league will play in party deliberations. The Youth League has captured many headlines with over-the-top pronouncements over the past

decades, but does not really have that much to show in terms of achieving its demands over that time. We also know that, even within progressive movements like the ANC, there is a tradition here of respect for the views and counsel of elders, especially when there is need to broker consensus. We also note that President Zuma, who joined the ANC in 1959 and MK in 1962, is himself an ANC veteran. End Comment.
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